

Undress Me

by

Michael Bettencourt

67 Highwood Terrace #2, Weehawken NJ 07086

(201) 770-0550; m.bett@verizon.net;

<http://www.m-bettencourt.com>

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Undress Me

DESCRIPTION

The language of love has many dialects, and Stefan and Laura explore the diphthongs of desires as Laura asks Stefan, in the middle of a crowded bar, to undress her with words. He gladly responds in the best mother tongue he knows.

CHARACTERS

- Stefan
- Laura (the "au" should be pronounced as "ow," the sound made when someone is injured).

SETTING

- Bar

TIME

- Present

MISCELLANEOUS

- Two bar stools
- Table
- Two glasses of beer

LAURA wears earrings and a pendant. The earrings will be removed. The pendant must also be easy to unclasp and remove, possibly connected with a small piece of velcro.

NOTES

In directing this, the director should aim for as much physical movement as possible, but kept small and, in most cases, never making actual contact. For instance, when STEFAN describes his breath along her neck, he should be standing close enough for LAURA to sense this, but he never actually touches her. Suggestion rather than palpable contact.

What also makes the play "work" is if the actors speak the stylized language as if it were "normal" routine speech. Emphasizing the stylization takes away the chance to play with(in) the language.

Undress Me

A bar -- chatter in the background. STEFAN and LAURA are sitting. She turns and looks at him, pauses, then speaks.

Undress me, Stefan. LAURA

Undress you. STEFAN

Yes. LAURA

Here. STEFAN

Here and now. LAURA

And why? STEFAN

It is time. LAURA

Time for what? STEFAN

For our leap forward. LAURA

This is quite a leap. STEFAN

Aren't you ready? LAURA

Quite a leap forward from just yesterday, where, STEFAN
if I remember, we held hands for the first time
without acting as if we'd touched each other by
accident.

Your point? LAURA

Well, to go from that to this without spending a STEFAN
little more time there and here --

You're scared. LAURA

STEFAN
No. Of what?

LAURA
Of me.

STEFAN
No.

LAURA
That I would go from that to this without following you there and here.

STEFAN
It is quite a lunge --

LAURA
(overlapping)
He's thinking, "I should leave --

STEFAN
I don't want --

LAURA
" -- before she takes me over the edge."

STEFAN
-- to leave. I don't want to leave.

LAURA
You want to stay.

STEFAN
Yes.

LAURA
Then you'll have to undress me.

STEFAN
The price of staying.

LAURA
The blessing of being here with this, which you say you want.

STEFAN
And only required that I undress you.

LAURA
In a manner of speaking.

STEFAN
And how?

LAURA
In a manner of speaking.

STEFAN
That -- moistens you?

LAURA
Like a stamp.

STEFAN
A new way to "go postal."

LAURA
Harden your resolve -- and do it.

STEFAN
And if I -- refuse? From modesty, of course.

LAURA
I will counter with flattery of the cunning
linguist. Such as: flatter, flatter, flatter,
and flatter -- enough?

STEFAN
You drive a sweet bargain.

LAURA
The dotted line awaits.

STEFAN
Signed -- sealed --

LAURA
Deliver.

STEFAN
Any particular style?

LAURA
Just start! I am not in the mood for
disquisitive analysis. Any style -- just make it
bold and italic.

STEFAN
Then close your eyes -- I am going to sit on the
porches of Laura's ears and tell tales of steam.

LAURA
I knew the slangster would come through.

STEFAN
Imagine --

LAURA
I obey.

STEFAN

Imagine this: in a room, warm -- with light,
lucent -- and music, dulcet. You know I'm there,
but can't see me.

LAURA

Is this a slow stalk, or a pounce?

STEFAN

Sshhh! You know I'm there because I am close
enough for you to feel my breath trace your neck
-- to trail along the slope of muscle that runs
from just behind the ear to your shoulder. I say
to you --

LAURA

"You are as savory as -- "

STEFAN

Who is telling here?

LAURA

Sorry.

STEFAN

In fact, I say nothing.

LAURA

What am I wearing?

STEFAN

Begin with your jewelry.

STEFAN takes off her earring as he says the line.

STEFAN

Lifting the silver slick of your earring, I slip
the back off and ease the post through the lobe -
- a slight fleshy tug, and then it's free.

STEFAN does the same to the second and puts both in his pocket.

STEFAN

Then the second earring.

STEFAN does not actually lick her ear.

STEFAN

With just the tip of my tongue, I trace the crimp
and cockle of your ear --

LAURA

Which one?

STEFAN

The right one -- my breath embroiders. You shiver.

LAURA

I -- squeeze.

STEFAN

(STEFAN unclasps the pendant)

The clasp of the pendant kneels on the top nub of your spine --

LAURA

You unlock it --

STEFAN

-- and let the pendulous weight slide through the valley --

STEFAN lets the pendant fall into his hand, which he positions at LAURA's waist.

LAURA

It is not the valley of shadow.

STEFAN

-- and then catch it at your waist --

LAURA

The equator --

STEFAN

And the light dances on the silver.

STEFAN puts the pendant on the table.

LAURA

What else?

STEFAN

Self-restraint! There are miles to go -- The latté-colored sweater you wear has small buttons that squeak as they squinch through the button hole. My fingers, thick and calm --

LAURA

Calm?

STEFAN

Narrator's prerogative. Thick and calm -- I poke them clumsily, but they're agreeable. Separation is their freedom.

LAURA

How many buttons?

STEFAN

How many do you want -- what will your impatience endure?

LAURA

Twelve -- no, fourteen.

STEFAN

I am at seven, then -- half done, half unopened gift.

LAURA

And what do you see?

STEFAN

Undergarmental infrastructure --

LAURA

Unlink it.

STEFAN

Low on the agenda.

LAURA

Move it up!

STEFAN

Seven buttons left, magic seven. Unbutton or rip through -- no, this instead: I will lift the sweater off, leaving the remaining seven buttons enslaved. Feel the slide of the yarn's grain --

LAURA

My hair sparks --

STEFAN

The hesitation of the cuffs over the wrists, then --

LAURA

Off.

STEFAN

Like a fallen flag.

LAURA

What color?

STEFAN

What?

LAURA

The brassiere.

STEFAN

Burgundy.

Underwire? LAURA

Soft cotton. STEFAN

What to do. LAURA

Indeed! To the southern hemisphere next and spelunk, or do slalom these gentle tectonics? STEFAN

Do something! LAURA

Stepping behind you -- STEFAN

I'm thirsty. LAURA

STEFAN takes her beer and guides it to her mouth. She drinks.

Behind you. STEFAN

The length of you -- yes. LAURA

I slide each cord over the flare of your shoulders and let it fall over your triceps -- STEFAN

Stop! Stop. I have to know your intentions past this point. Breasts unaltered are nothing, palm-sized flesh -- "tits" are like a snack food. But there are grottoes and groves -- LAURA

Deeper divisions. STEFAN

Deeper nourishment. Do you plan to pillage? LAURA

No -- ponder. STEFAN

Loot? LAURA

No -- linger. STEFAN

Disappear? LAURA

No -- discover. STEFAN

Can I trust? LAURA

You wouldn't have started if you didn't. STEFAN

You have your passport, then. LAURA

Urgency -- the skirt unzipped, run down the rigging of your legs -- the gartered stockings, puddles at your feet -- the silk diphthonged underwear, darted off hummingbird-quick. Thick and no longer calm. STEFAN

STEFAN hesitates.

Go on! LAURA

We have arrived. STEFAN

Where? LAURA

At the border. STEFAN

Cross it! LAURA

STEFAN hesitates again. LAURA opens her eyes.

What? LAURA

Wait. STEFAN

For what? LAURA

Should we cross this border? STEFAN

Imagine it! LAURA

STEFAN

The room, warm -- the light, lucent -- the music,
dulcet. The discarded clothes watchful. The
narrator -- the narrator is at a loss for words
as he looks upon --

LAURA

What?

STEFAN

Close your eyes.

LAURA

What?

STEFAN

Close your eyes.

LAURA

And then?

STEFAN

The narrator looks upon more sweet beauty than
his eyes deserve.

LAURA

And what sayeth the tongue?

STEFAN

This: "nothing which we are to perceive in this
world equals / the power of your intense
fragility: whose texture / compels me with the
colour of its countries... / (something in me
understands / the voice of your eyes is deeper
than all roses) / nobody, not even the rain, has
such small hands"¹

LAURA

(opens her eyes)

That's what it says?!

STEFAN

Consider it a moment of -- ripeness. Consider it
-- stepping on the border. Not over.

LAURA

Close your eyes. Close them! All right: the
room, warm -- the light, lucent -- the music,
dulcet. Urgency -- the pants unzipped, run down
the rigging of your legs -- socks and shoes,
scattered -- cotton briefs --

¹ e.e. cummings, "Somewhere I Have Never
Travelled, Gladly Beyond"

STEFAN

Bikinis --

LAURA

Bikinis, darted off hummingbird-quick.

STEFAN

The shirt?

LAURA

Ripped open like a veil. Now -- thick, and no longer calm. "His eyes are as the eyes of doves by the rivers of waters... / his cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers... / his hands are as gold rings set with the beryl... / his mouth is most sweet: yea, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend."² A second foot on the border.

STEFAN opens his eyes.

STEFAN

How well do we know each other?

LAURA

How well should we?

STEFAN

How well can we?

LAURA

How much to risk?

STEFAN

How much more undress to undress?

They close their eyes.

STEFAN

Those two people standing in the room, warm --

LAURA

The light, lucent --

STEFAN

The music, dulcet.

LAURA

They are standing breathful and poised.

STEFAN

Let's leave them there.

² Song of Solomon, 5:10-16

LAURA
Next to their tree of knowledge.

STEFAN
Growing on the border.

LAURA
The fruit hanging.

STEFAN
Their mouths prepared.

LAURA opens her eyes and picks up her beer.

LAURA
And as for our mouths --

She proceeds to drink. So does STEFAN. They finish and put their glasses down. They bring their faces close together but do not kiss. STEFAN balls his hand into a fist and holds it over their heads. LAURA reaches up and "plucks" the fruit and brings it up between them. They both bite on it as if biting an apple. Sounds of chatter in the background. Blackout.